

In Defense of Local Journalism
Letter to the Editor, THE GREER CITIZEN (July 2021).

As a resident of Greer, I greatly appreciated the Citizen's June 16th editorial that encouraged readers to "[t]ake in multiple sources. Do as much of your own research as you can. Come to your own conclusions." The editors' exhortation was incredibly refreshing in light of efforts by most corporate news networks and social media platforms to suppress dissenting viewpoints. But not all readers shared my appreciation, as evidenced by John Hanson's recent letter to the editor.

In his letter, Mr. Hanson contends that the Greer Citizen "champion[s] crackpot theories, salacious rumors and outright gibberish" for encouraging readers to carefully research the facts of various issues and to think critically about what the evidence shows. As to the Citizen's well-founded concern about the censorship of dissenting viewpoints, including potentially life-saving treatments for COVID-19, he states that his "best guess" as to why the editors criticized such censorship is because they "really object to social media removing both blatantly false and racist posts." He claims further that "the editorial relies on the reader to have such an open and empty mind, ravaged by the disability to not remember the recent past." Finally, Mr. Hanson takes a jab at the Citizen's integrity, implying that the paper has been dishonest in its reporting by claiming that it "needs to live up to" the "honest" part of the paper's motto. With these accusations, Mr. Hanson not only slanders the editors but also insults readers who question the inconsistent narrative promoted by Facebook, YouTube, and corporate media.

If the Greer Citizen were peddling "crackpot theories," as claimed by Mr. Hanson, then our town's paper likely would not have published his letter saying as much. But because the Citizen clearly believes in freedom of expression, it published his letter, despite the fact that it misrepresents the editors' arguments and creates a caricature of their positions. The editors deserve a great deal of respect for their willingness to publish his letter, especially when Mr. Hanson asserts that they likely decry censorship because they "object to social media removing both blatantly false and racist posts." Perhaps Mr. Hanson does not mean to imply that the editors are racist, but including this language in his letter when the original editorial nowhere addressed issues of race unfairly links the editors' concerns with the evils of racism.

As to Mr. Hanson's claim that the editors advocate for their readers to have an "empty mind" and that both the paper and its readers forget the recent past, this is a perfect example of gaslighting. Focusing on the lab leak theory, Mr. Hanson provides several examples of how government officials and media outlets mentioned the possibility of SARS-CoV-2 originating in a lab in China; however, he fails to address the editors' accurate claim that social media companies, aided by "fact-checkers," have repeatedly and relentlessly censored posts related to this theory over the past year. More importantly, Facebook, YouTube, and others have repeatedly censored countless doctors and scientists who have advocated for safe and effective treatments—treatments that have been largely ignored by corporate media and suppressed by many public health officials. Before concluding that such recommendations are "crackpot theories," I humbly ask Mr. Hanson (and all readers) to watch a recent interview with the creator of mRNA vaccine technology, as he discusses multiple evidence-based treatments that have been suppressed as well as significant dangers posed by the vaccines currently in use. Search Bret Weinstein's "How to Save the World in Three Easy Steps" for this thorough interview.

Finally, Mr. Hanson also claimed that the Greer Citizen “advocate[s] for the journalist to be mere stenographer . . . making no such judgmental calls as to the truth and accuracy of competing claims.” Mr. Hanson again misrepresents the editors’ arguments, but he also misunderstands the purpose of journalism. The editors view journalists as far more than “mere stenographers,” recognizing that they are tasked with investigating leads and reporting facts—facts that will enable citizens of Greer to weigh the evidence and make informed decisions. Such reporting should help us think, but in no case should a journalist ever tell us WHAT to think.

If Mr. Hanson believes that readers should simply trust journalists to tell them what to believe, it is curious that he would not accept as true what the editors of the Citizen have written. But this gets to the heart of the issue: Which sources should we trust? Should we trust larger media outlets and health organizations simply because they are larger and “authoritative,” even when they often have significant conflicts of interest? Or should we trust local journalists who are invested in their communities and scientists who are not beholden to moneyed interests? I know who I choose to trust. Do you?

—Joshua J. Styles, Greer, SC